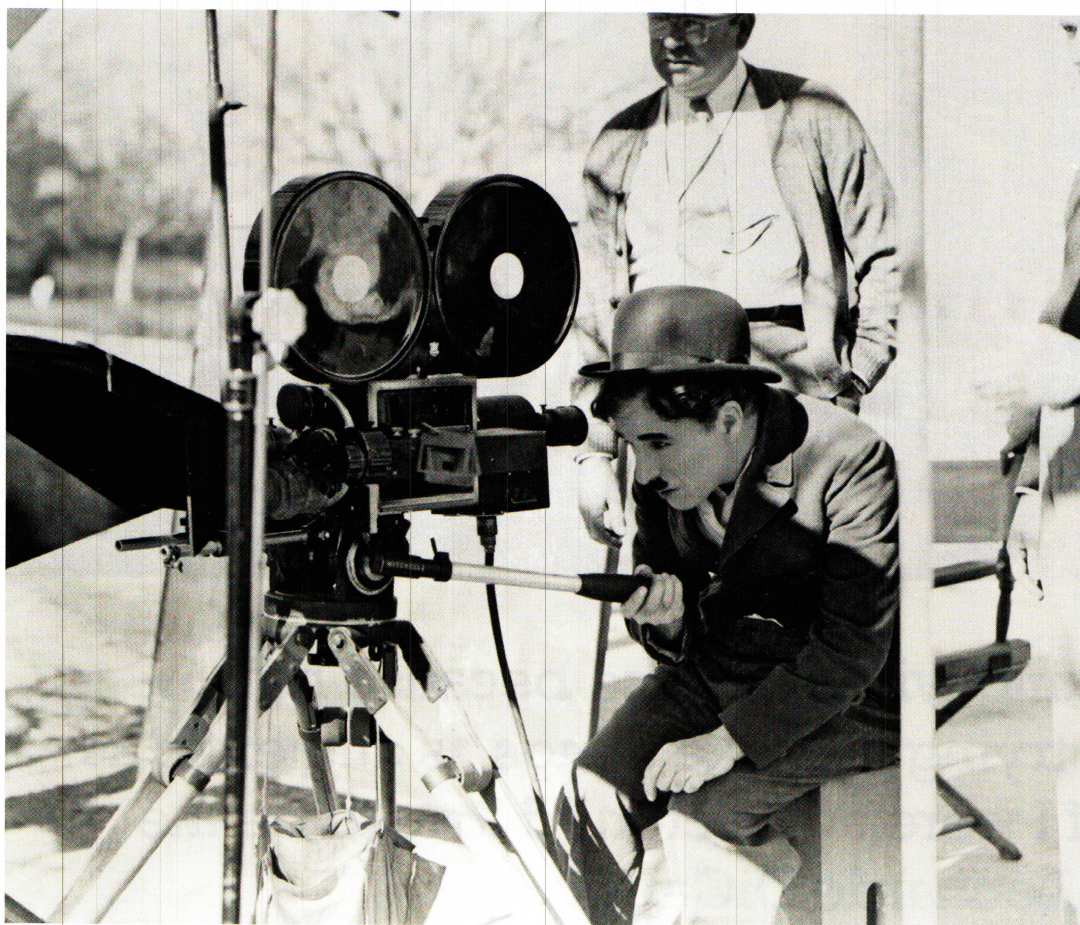


# MAGIC HOURS:

## THE WORLD'S GREATEST SETS

However great or otherwise a film turns out, there remains something divine about their creation. *Empire* pays homage to a century of filmmaking...

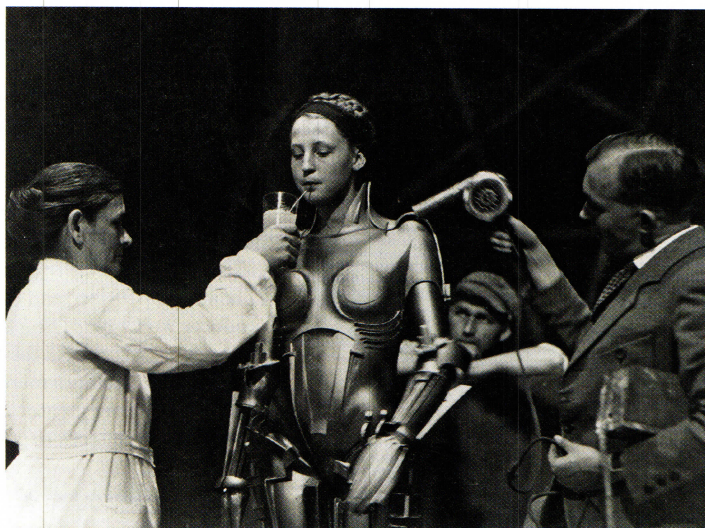
WORDS IAN NATHAN



### ABOVE AND RIGHT

**The Gold Rush (1925):** Ever the perfectionist, Chaplin shot 27 times more footage than ended up on the screen. More surprisingly, the film was inspired by finding the comedy value in the real-life Donner Party legend, in which snowed-in emigrants reverted to cannibalism.

**Metropolis (1927):** Fritz Lang's dystopian vision was the *Avatar* of its day, and crippled its studio. Strictly speaking, no-one has yet seen the full film. A copy of the director's original cut was discovered in Argentina in 2008 — the full 210-minute restoration is due to be screened this year.





## BELOW AND RIGHT

**The Wizard Of Oz (1939):** The MGM lot as Munchkinland — legend has it the 350-strong “Munchkins”, shipped in from across the globe, drank and caroused their way across L.A., including at least one knee-high bar-brawl breaking out when a waiter mistakenly pulled out a highchair in a hamburger joint.

**The Magnificent Ambersons (1942):** Lost forever, Orson Welles’s original cut of his family epic was shorn of 50 minutes by a diffident RKO and lumbered with a happy ending. While intrepid researchers still dream of unearthing those fabled missing reels, it seems likely they were destroyed. The film remains a shadow. ➤



a l i f e  
**ON-SET**  
**GREATEST**

KOBAL PHOTO FEST





# MY ON-SET ESSENTIAL

We asked six directors to tell us what they couldn't possibly survive a movie shoot without...

## PETER JACKSON

"A cup of tea! I can't survive more than about half-an-hour without one. I must be addicted, it's terrible. I deviate — I use Twinings until I'm sick of it, then I go PG Tips, and so on. After a month, I have to switch to something else."



## RICHARD LINKLATER

"Generally, I'm not at all superstitious. But a new pair of shoes with good arch support is important."



## MICHAEL BAY

"I always take Acai berries on set with me. I swear to God, they're all that keep me going sometimes — this little purple fruit. Also kombucha, which is like a magic drink."



## PAUL GREENGRASS

"That's legal? I think I'd have to say a pen. But it's got to be a certain sort of pen for me. I've got one in my pocket right now. It's called a Pilot. I use them all the time."



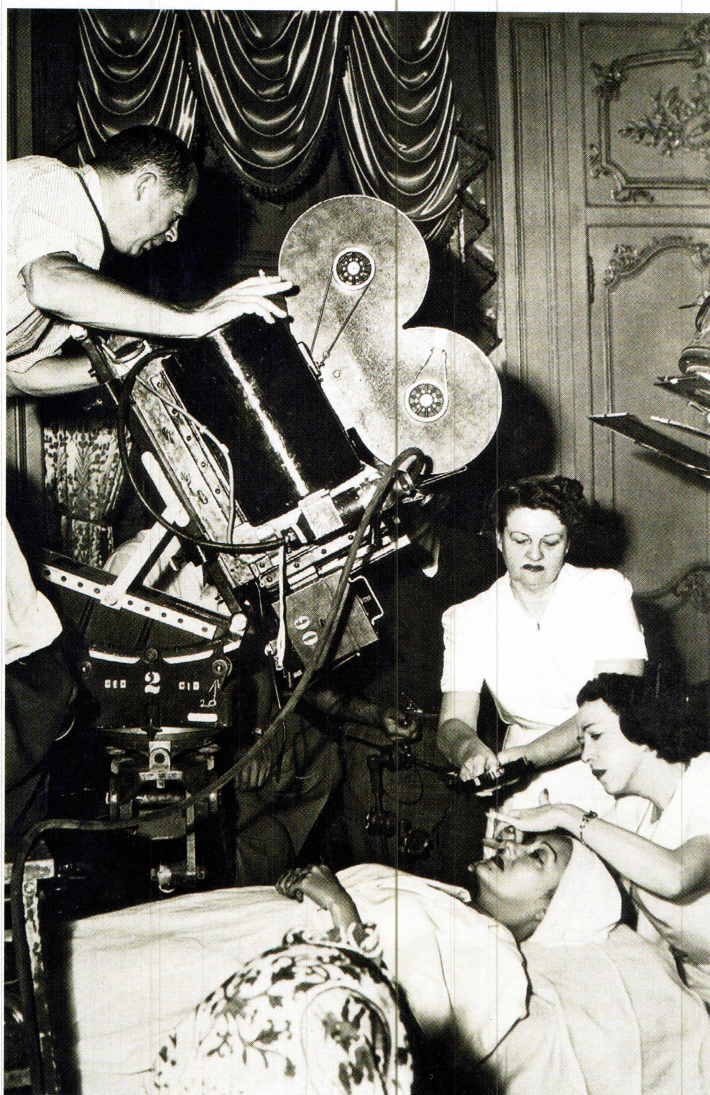
## PARK CHAN-WOOK

"I love to take pictures of my actors on set, it gives me inspiration. One day I hope to hold a photo exhibition of my own work. So if I had to pick one item, it would be this camera."



## EDGAR WRIGHT

"Coffee. On *Scott Pilgrim* I drank something called 'rocket fuel', this really strong stuff with an extra espresso shot poured in. When I ask the ADs for it, 'heroin' is the code word: 'I need a double-heroin!' Anyone listening would think I've got a drug problem!"



KOBAL, PHOTOFEST, HEADPRESS, GETTY





## LEFT, ABOVE AND FAR LEFT

**Sunset Boulevard (1950):** Billy Wilder knew enough of the real silent stars who'd faded to obscurity to sail his film close to the truth. It was a tough sell to an actress: Mae West, Mary Pickford and Greta Garbo shuddered at the idea of has-been Norma Desmond. Gloria Swanson got her in a heartbeat, but it took friend George Cukor to persuade her to try for it: "If they want you to do 10 screen tests, do 10 screen tests. If you don't, I will personally shoot you."

**Rear Window (1954):** Hitchcock understood, with technical aplomb, that a set could be as big a character as an actor. Thirty-one apartments, 12 fully furnished, prelit for night or day with the flick of a switch, it is arguably the most accomplished backdrop in film history, in that it is the entire film. Hitch directed from James Stewart's (and our) vantage point, equipping his actors with tiny walkie-talkies and offering instruction from afar, almost like a conductor.

**Some Like It Hot (1959):** Famously, Tony Curtis asked if he could do the Cary Grant impression for the movie. Wilder was impressed. However, when Grant saw the movie he just tutted, "I don't talk like that."



## ABOVE TOP, ABOVE AND LEFT

**Spartacus (1960):** With typical Kubrickian detail, the director spent \$40,000 building his gladiatorial complex beside a Los Angeles freeway, employing and training every one of the then-187 stunt men in Hollywood. A giant asbestos screen had to be erected for its destruction to prevent flames and smoke reaching drivers.

**West Side Story (1961):** Co-director Robert Wise was determined to shoot on location in New York. Smartly, as the West Side was then a fairly risky neighbourhood, he hired real local gangs to patrol the set as "security".

**The Great Escape (1963):** Steve McQueen as the inimitable Hilt — The Cooler King — and fellow cast members took the Method thing too far. With stories of actors racing to and from their German set, the local police set up a speed trap. Several cast and crew were caught, the last being McQueen. The star was hauled before an unimpressed Chief Of Police. "Herr McQueen, we have caught several of your comrades today," he sneered, "but you have won the prize [for the highest speed]." McQueen was briefly jailed. Although not in a cooler. ▶





## ABOVE, TOP RIGHT, AND RIGHT

**Barbarella (1968):** Roger Vadim's astronautical aviatrix has a mixed rep, not least with Jane Fonda herself. "Where was your head at when you made *Barbarella*?" asked an audience member during an on-stage Q&A with the actress, at the height of her "Hanoi Jane" notoriety. "I don't know — up my armpit," she sneered. "We all make mistakes."

**Get Carter (1971):** Director Mike Hodges has never seen the Stallone remake of his gangster classic, but came close. His son gave him a dodgy DVD copy from Hong Kong, and one night he got drunk enough to put it in the player: "The system wasn't compatible and the disc wouldn't play, so we put it in the dustbin."

**Bugsy Malone (1976):** Looking for his perfect Fat Sam (bottom left, unsplurged), Alan Parker went to a Brooklyn classroom and asked who was the naughtiest boy. In unison they all cried, "John Cassisi!" The rascal never looked back.

## ODD JOBS

Need someone to wrangle sperm? Train a bathtub? Or, er, MC a meat dinner? *Empire* reveals the strangest on-set jobs in Hollywood...



### BATHTUB TRAINER

Need a bath to come alive and try to eat your lead actress? Call Thomas Floutz, a prolific make-up FX artist who was in charge of the gag in *Ghostbusters 2*. "The tub was a rubber miniature I manhandled into a mouth shape. And golly, things couldn't be more frightening!" Floutz came up with the credit himself, stir-crazy from working alone on the ILM soundstage. "Sigourney never got to meet me, but she is a pro and she didn't let it affect her performance," he quips.

### FOOD STYLIST

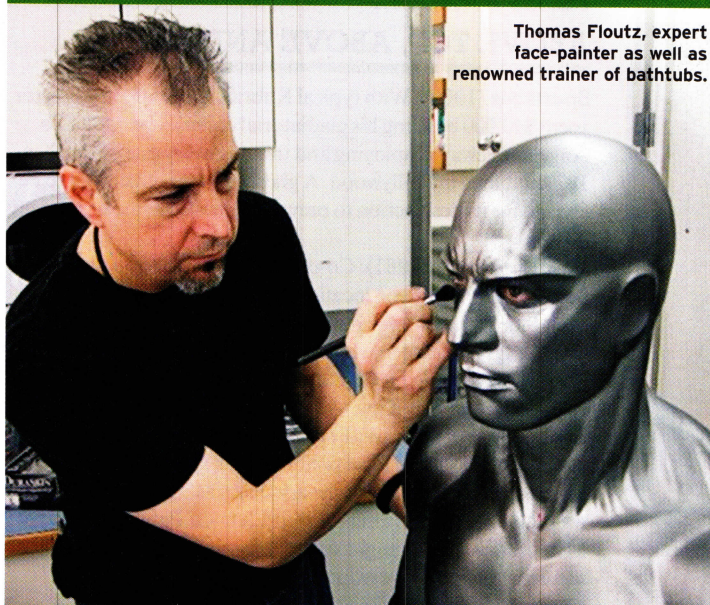
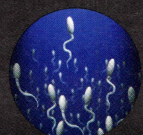
Bonnie Belknap makes inedible items edible, crafting cunning replacements when actors don't want to eat what's scripted (oysters a specialty). She carved rats out of beef fillet for *Waterworld*, invented edible pot pourri for *Made Of Honour*, and

cooked up cigarettes, records and a TV remote for *Earth Girls Are Easy*. She says her biggest and most rewarding challenge was Steven Spielberg's *Hook*: "Edible ships firing malt cannonballs; edible trees; an edible quarry with sugar boulders; edible snakes and lizards. Steven was thrilled!"



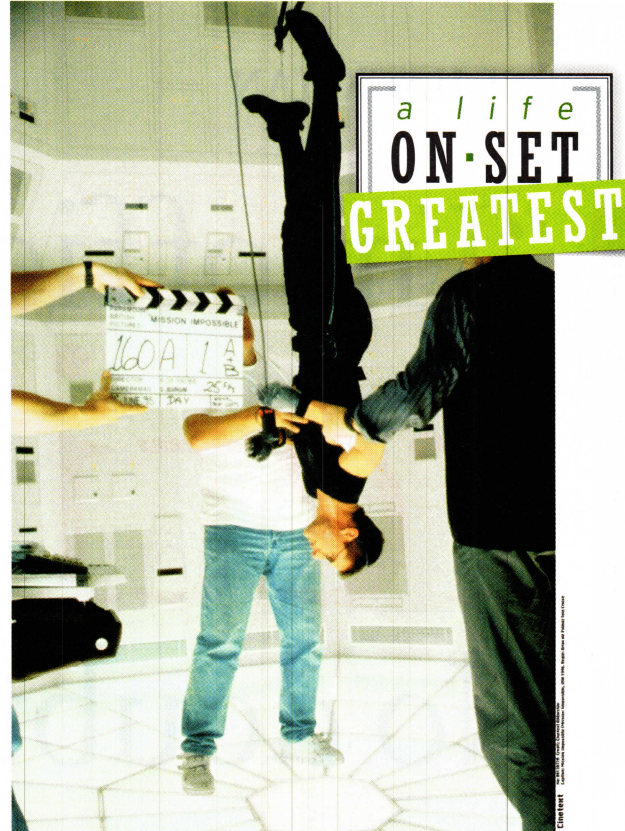
### SPERM WRANGLER

"It's one of my proudest moments," says Blair Clark of his credit on *Look Who's Talking Too*. Working on an old-school "cloud tank" effect (a liquid-filled tank used for making cloud effects like those in *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*) for the birth canal shots, Clark found that silicone sperms weighted with ball bearings



Thomas Floutz, expert face-painter as well as renowned trainer of bathtubs.





## ABOVE, RIGHT AND ABOVE RIGHT

**Superman (1978):** Robert Redford, Kris Kristofferson, James Caan, Nick Nolte, Jon Voight and Arnold Schwarzenegger were all considered. Sylvester Stallone actively campaigned for it, but was reportedly vetoed by Marlon Brando, commencing a minor feud between them. In the end, producers the Salkinds wanted an unknown, with Christopher Reeve beating, among others, the family dentist.

**Fitzcarraldo (1982):** To film the quest of heaving a 340-ton steamboat up an Amazonian hillside, Werner Herzog simply heaved a boat up a hillside. With the help of a bulldozer.

**Mission: Impossible (1996):** Brian De Palma found dangling Tom Cruise from the ceiling by cables in order to filch the NOC list a tricky task. Cruise kept clonking his head on the floor. The solution proved decidedly lo-fi: fill his shoes with coins. ■



"had a very naturalistic movement" as they dropped through the water. "Nowadays I get 'animatronic technician' or 'effects supervisor', but I'll be stuck with 'sperm wrangler' forever."

### MEAT DINNER MC

William Preston Robertson has done all kinds of odd jobs for the Coen brothers: that's his voice howling on the other side of the wall in *Barton Fink*, and his credit for *Lebowski* was "Giggles/Howls/Marmots". On *Fargo* he was Field Archivist For Minnesota Accents, interviewing Minnesotans to help the actors nail the intonation. But his actual given credit on the film is Meat Dinner MC. "That's just a joke, to acknowledge me," explains Robertson. "It was a steak dinner to celebrate the end of production. Joel and Ethan thought Meat Dinner sounded funnier. And I didn't even attend!"

### FOURTH DIMENSIONAL CONSULTANT

Stefan Dechant, *Contact's* Fourth Dimensional Consultant (and more recently, Art Director on *Avatar* and *Alice In Wonderland*), was involved in brainstorming sessions discussing encoded alien radio signals, spacecraft design and what wormhole travel might look like. "Scientific accuracy was extremely important," he insists. One of his (ultimately modified) ideas was to have a fractured Foster: "There would be two Ellies in the pod at the same time, but only the Ellie in the present would be aware of the Ellies of the past or future." It remains one of Dechant's favourite credits, but "there really was no fourth-dimensional consulting going on".

### MEWES WRANGLER

Filming *Jay And Silent Bob Strike*



Back at the height of Jason Mewes's heroin addiction required the services of a full-time Mewes Wrangler. Malcolm Ingram stepped into the breach. He says the basic job description was to keep Mewes distracted (usually with alcohol, when filming was finished), to play Xbox Hockey, and to chaperone him to "a lot of horrible L.A. parties" every night. "One time we nearly got beaten up by Vincent Gallo and Tobey Maguire," Ingram recalls fondly.

### SURREALISTIC MAKE-UP SHUNTING PUPPETEER

The latex-ripping, body-morphing alien sex orgy at the climax of Brian Yuzna's *Society* required an army of FX technicians from the workshop of the infamous Screaming Mad George. Not least of these was Surrealistic Make-Up Shunting Puppeteer Mitch Greenblatt. "My job was having my disembodied hand walk along

a sofa and grab the face of a policeman," he remembers. "My hand looked more like an independently walking creature than anyone else's."

### ANIMAL COLOURIST

"Terry Gilliam wanted the Red Knight's horse to have a flaming paint job, like a 1950s car," says Douglas White, *The Fisher King's* Animal Colourist. Having painted horses blue and gold for *Star Trek V*, White was the obvious man for the job, using non-permanent, non-toxic henna to get his results. "I invented that title," says the man usually credited for prosthetic make-up. "Because, essentially, it was all I was doing. And nobody else was."

OWEN WILLIAMS

